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Politics of Equitable Development?

All in all, I think the book addresses the *politics of implementing social policies* rather than the politics of equitable development per se. This is because the author does not provide a solid link between his studied policies and equitable outcomes. Take education policies (pp. 106–109), for example. Even though education may lead to individual betterment, whether it generates national prosperity and reduces income disparity is highly controversial in the economics literature. If the key to Malaysia's equitable development, as the author states, is the support for its citizens to “exit the traditional agricultural sector and gain more productive employment in the modern economy” (p. 48), then policies toward the manufacturing sector are equally, if not more, important than education policies for that specific purpose.

Despite the above debatable flaws, the book makes a significant contribution to both the institutionalist and Southeast Asian bodies of literature. In regard to the former, *Institutional Imperative* looks at the role of political institutions in determining equitable development, a crucial topic neglected amid the rise of new institutionalism. More profound is its impact upon the latter body of work. The book's comparative approach presents an advance in regional knowledge accumulation—the call for which was sounded by Kuhonta's own co-edited volume, *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis* (2008)—and paves the way for a new era of Southeast Asian scholarship.

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Reference

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Orientalists, Propagandists, and Ilustrados: Filipino Scholarship and the End of Spanish Colonialism

MEGAN C. THOMAS

Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012, 277p.

In *Orientalists, Propagandists, and Ilustrados: Filipino Scholarship and the End of Spanish Colonialism*, Megan C. Thomas illustrates the myriad political meanings and possibilities of modern scholarly knowledge. During the 1880s and early 1890s, a critical mass of linguistic, folklore, ethnological, and historical studies on the Spanish Philippines materialized. Researched and

written mostly by a small yet diverse group of young cosmopolitan scholars, who thought of the Philippines as their homeland, this corpus of work engaged with, and troubled the contours of different scholarly practices such as Orientalism, racial studies, and what would come to be known as anthropology. As Thomas points out, unlike other examples of Orientalist and anthropological studies, works on the Philippines appear exceptional because of the specific biographies of the authors. Contemporarily referred to as *ilustrados* and propagandists, these so-called “native” intellectuals utilized novel research methods and rearticulated official Spanish archives in order to not only revise histories of their homeland, but also to imagine new and alternative political futures.

These imagined political futures did not necessarily lead to the nation. As Thomas cogently argues, although these works laid the groundwork for what could potentially be the nation, these works remained ambivalent, divergent, and open in regards to the question of sovereignty in the Philippines. Indeed, despite being politically and ideologically diverse, these “native” authors tapped into a world that “recognized no political boundaries or authority, but only the authority of reason and evidence” (p. 4). Moreover, scholarly works, by virtue of appearing as politically neutral, could sneak past the watchful eyes of Spanish censors. Thomas, therefore, highlights the fascination held by Filipinos for the radically open world of modern knowledge and science in which the nation would be, as Vicente Rafael argues, but one of many effects of a type of modern “historical excess” (2005, xvi). Thomas nevertheless innovatively sheds new light on scholarly works and practices that have heretofore remained overlooked for its ambiguous political contents. Indeed, other than Resil Mojares’ comprehensive text, *Brains of the Nation* (2008), the scholarly works of *ilustrados* and propagandists have been largely relegated to footnotes in Philippine studies. Unlike Mojares, however, Thomas lingers longer on the unanticipated political possibilities and unforeseen consequences of “native” scholarly works.

The authors covered in *Orientalists, Propagandists, and Ilustrados* should be familiar to those acquainted with Philippine historiography. Names such as T. H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes y Florentino, Mariano Ponce, Pedro Serrano Laktaw, Pedro Paterno, and José Rizal have been praised, in various and uneven ways, as heroes within nationalist and anti-colonial narratives. As a result, up to contemporary times, their writings and biographies have been repeatedly referenced and put to use in Philippine education, popular culture, and politics. It is easy to see this contemporary resonance when considering that these “native” authors, on the whole collectively identified as modern, cosmopolitan, Christian, and indigenous to the Philippines. For certain, although Thomas consistently reminds the reader of the diverse and varied relation each author had with the Philippines, the awareness of their particular biographical differences from Spanish and European scholars would greatly color how “native” scholars approached both traditional and newer sciences and disciplines.

The notion of authority provides one of the richest topics in Thomas’s book. By gaining

authority over colonial knowledge, “native” scholars could not only trouble or challenge Spanish claims to knowledge, but also envision possible worlds in which “natives” held not only intellectual but also political authority. Chapter one brilliantly illustrates this argument by first situating the scholarship of *ilustrados* and propagandists within a global intellectual field of nineteenth century Orientalism, paying particular attention to the differences and similarities of works dedicated to British India. Orientalist studies of the Philippines diverged from British India in two critical ways. First, one of the most prevalent motifs in Orientalist studies of India was the narrative of civilizational decline or stagnation before British colonialism. Because there was no recognizable pre-colonial civilizational analogue, Orientalist studies of the Philippines stressed the decline of colonial civilization under the Spanish. Second, unlike in India, there was no tradition of Spanish Orientalist studies of the Philippines. This scholarly gap allowed for “native” intellectuals to assert that they were the true authorities of Philippine knowledge, thereby not only troubling Spanish claims to intellectual authority but Spanish authority in general.

A likewise fascinating theme involves the protean character of categories such as race, nation, and Filipino. Although Thomas remains vigilant in underscoring how these studies of social difference maintained political hierarchies and exclusions, she simultaneously reminds the reader that these categories were also based on the presumption of the commensurability of collective groups of people. For example, “native” studies of ethnology and folklore uncovered patterns of racial commonalities across the vast diversity of ethnolinguistic communities making up the Philippines. The scholarly grammar of race articulated the image of a cohered people in which each member could feel equal to other members. Thus, rather than being considered abhorrent or inimitable, individual “native” acts and lives would now belong to a larger history of a cohered, collective, and potentially eternal Filipino race.

In addition to uncovering patterns of broad commonalities, “native” scholarly works, at least in the eyes of many in the Philippine public, frighteningly diminished and occluded the presence and influence of the Spanish. Thomas, in the final two chapters sheds light on how “native” scholars, through the use of orthography and official colonial and missionary archives, created critical revisions of language and history. For instance in the fourth chapter, the seemingly innocuous replacement of the letter “k” for “c” in “native” Filipino languages championed by de los Reyes and Rizal, produced a flurry of anxiety in the Manila public sphere. In another instance, chapter five recounts how “native” scholars created revisionist historical narratives of the ethical decline of Spanish governance. Resonating with Orientalist tropes, “native” revisionists stressed that Spanish sovereignty could only continue “by the grace of the people” (p. 199). From examples such as these, Thomas makes the remarkable argument that orthographic reforms and revisionist history appeared threatening not only for obscuring Spanish influences but also because it imagined possibilities of a Philippine future without Spain.

Containing an introduction, conclusion, and five well-paced chapters, *Orientalists, Propagan-*

dists, and *Ilustrados* moves in a brisk and logical manner. Thomas refreshingly lets the primary documents speak for themselves, rather than forcing texts to fit awkwardly into broader theoretical frames. As a result, her line of reasoning is easy to follow and remains open to surprise, potentially resonating with diverse audiences. Although modest in claims, Thomas's book in actuality travels the same intellectual paths cleared by Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* ([1983] 2006) and Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993). Thomas's work should therefore be considered in conversation with recent groundbreaking scholarship that pushes studies of nationalism, postcolonialism, and "native" intellectual history into more nuanced regions such as Vicente Rafael's *Promise of the Foreign* (2005), Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000), and Pheng Cheah's *Spectral Nationality* (2003). Moreover, with its deft illumination of the inherent ambivalence within discourses of race and civilization, Thomas's book should have great appeal to students of American and Spanish imperial and racial formation and American Ethnic Studies. With all this in mind, one hopes that Thomas, in future works, follows a line of inquiry provocatively suggested in her concluding chapter—namely, rather than thinking of Philippine scholarship as simply appropriating and remediating imperial discourses, what if it is placed instead within the histories of emerging European nationalisms of its time, particularly Germany? In what ways can this intellectual constellation reveal potential imagined Philippine futures that have heretofore remained obscured or yet to be realized?

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